



DAVID HOBBY : SUN STAFF

At his annual summer picnic, held at the Carroll County Farm Museum last month, state Sen. Larry Haines speaks with constituents.

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**GOP stalwart dominates at home, not in Annapolis**

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SUN STAFF

The temperature hovered near 100, but state Sen. Larry E. Haines couldn't have looked cooler as he worked the crowd at his 13th annual picnic fundraiser in Westminster. The Carroll County Republican, whose crop of thick white hair makes him a standout in any setting, was equally at ease chatting with straight-laced politicians and leather-clad bikers.

While redistricting has expanded his district to include northern Baltimore County, Haines' political strength remains firmly grounded in his home county. And his picnic is Carroll's grandest political event — a reminder of his place as the most secure, recognizable and popular Republican in a county where the party holds every state and county elected office.

Haines' stature at home means little in Democrat-dominated Annapolis, but it has in recent years discouraged chal-

lengers. And his popularity has him thinking about bigger things, including a possible congressional run.

At 64, he has built a successful real estate business and raised a family, but politics has been his passion since he was a little boy, and no matter how easy an election seems, he never lets up.

"I have an opponent, and I take that seriously," he said last week in his Westminster office. "When my wife heard I had an opponent this time, she said, 'Now you're happy.'"

Haines is being opposed by Westminster maintenance worker Ronald Zepp. Attempts to reach Zepp for comment were not successful. Few political observers give Zepp, a Democrat and political novice, much of a chance in the general election against the three-term incumbent.

Democratic officials don't bother targeting Haines because they assume his support is too solid. Few observers expect the expansion of his district into Baltimore County to stop him, either — the new territory is almost as heavily Republican as Haines' core jurisdiction in Carroll.

Carroll political observers say Haines does so well in his home

county because he never strays from his conservative beliefs, even in Annapolis, where principle has been known to be bartered for votes.

"He stands up for what he believes in, and he doesn't lie," said Christian Cavey, a Hampstead-based real estate agent who would share part of Haines' district if he wins his bid for a Baltimore County delegate seat. "People have a lot of respect for that, regardless of party."

It doesn't hurt that Republicans make up almost 60 percent of the county's registered voters or that Haines' biography — he was born to a farm family, succeeded as a small-business owner and attends church weekly — fits the county's profile so neatly.

But if Haines is the political king of Carroll County, his stature diminishes in Annapolis. Haines, whose most notable achievements involve toughening penalties for criminals and preserving farmland, serves as minority whip, a sign of respect from his own party, but Democrats rule the legislature.

And Gov. Parris N. Glendening has loomed in the background, ready to veto conservative bills and, critics say, eager to bash Carroll for not following

his Smart Growth doctrine. Some Democrats say staunch conservatives like Haines have polarized the Senate and made compromise increasingly elusive.

"Senator Haines is part of a cadre of Republicans who've basically divorced themselves from doing their jobs, because they'd rather stand on the sideline and throw spitballs," said Robert Paulson, spokesman for the Maryland Democratic Party.

Conservatives counter that regardless of who wins the gubernatorial race, Republicans will be less marginalized than they were under Glendening.

"You remove the governor's heavy hand on pet issues, and it's not that hard to get people, including Democrats, to vote conservative," said Sen. Andrew P. Harris, a Cockeysville Republican who described Haines as one of the most honest senators in Annapolis.

Haines acknowledged that legislative work can be frustrating, but said he takes solace in helping his constituents with small problems.

One man called him recently, he said, complaining that an emergency crew had left a pile of latex gloves and flares on the side of the road. Instead of telling the man such problems were outside of his sphere, Haines said he would have someone clean up the mess or come out and clean it himself.

"What people don't want is somebody who has all the power in Annapolis and then, when a constituent calls, won't take the phone call," Haines said.

Haines interest in politics stretches back to the tight-knit Carroll farm community of the 1940s and 1950s. His earliest memories include trips over Carroll's dusty back roads to the voting polls and long conversations about politics with his New Deal-loving grandfather, who tried to make him a Democrat.

He said he built his political network throughout his years as a real estate agent, so that, in his first bid for state Senate in 1990, he had a network of 12 people he trusted to run his campaign.

He has kept that core together, he said, describing the familiar crew as a key to his success.

His biggest challenge came in that first campaign, when he faced two-term county commissioner Jeff Griffith. Haines took 57 percent of the vote.

"I fell in love with it all, even putting up the signs," he said. "My wife told me to just be who I am. I think people took me for my word."

Asked about the future, Haines said he would like Republican Roscoe G. Bartlett's seat in Congress, though he didn't say he'd challenge Bartlett directly.

He's begun attending political events in western parts of the congressional district, trying to build the familiarity he says fueled his success in Carroll.

Haines' personal touch with Carroll constituents was obvious at his \$20-a-head picnic two weeks ago at the Carroll County Farm Museum, where he greeted more than 1,100 guests, many by first name.

None of the 12 previous picnics was rained out, and the 2002 edition would be no different. To some, it seems as if Haines' reach extends beyond Carroll politics. "Larry would never let it rain," said one guest, Diana Gullo of New Windsor.